

1983

Borinquen

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ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

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The College of Fine and Applied Arts
in Candidacy for the Degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

BORINQUEN

by

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I would like to thank Amarilis Rodríguez for her enthusiastic support during the research of this thesis report.

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INTRODUCTION

On my arrival to Rochester I had found myself a bit stranded not knowing where to stay for a good night's sleep. I jumped into my just purchased white 1960 Falcon and drove down the first lighted street I found. Several minutes had passed when I came across a place called Howard Johnsons. I pulled over into a parking lot and walked into the building. After shaking off the chill of the weather my eyes moved from side to side and realized it was a restaurant. I noticed that all movement had ceased; heads had turned my way. Feeling kind of silly, I asked a woman behind the cash register where I could go to get a room. She pointed through a window towards a dark A-frame structure. "Thank you", I said and left.

Tired after a long trip by jet and car I walked into the lobby where a man in his mid-thirties sat reading a magazine. He looked me over from short curly hair to tan pinholed leather shoes.

"Can I help you?"

"Yes, please. I'd like a room for the night." His eyes never left me. I felt uneasy as he placed himself by the side of the counter.

"Are you alone?"

"Yes."

"Where are you from?"

I proudly answered, "Puerto Rico."

"May I see your green card or passport?" I thought he was joking, but his face showed no signs of humor. I froze in a surprised state.

Obviously he did not know where and what Puerto Rico was in relation to the United States. I pulled out my Puerto Rico driver's license, social security card, and Red Cross Medical First Aid card from my wallet.

"Is this enough?"

His head slowly shook as he gave them a glance.

"No, I'm afraid you'll have to show me your passport. Don't you have a passport?"

My patience was thinning. It was inevitable that I must bring this man's geography and history to date. I could not help thinking how ignorant and sheltered he was. Something else crossed my mind; I better be very convincing on what I say or end up spending the night in a cold car.

"I don't have a passport with me," my voice was calm, "and I don't have a green card. Actually, I don't need either one of those cards; I'm a citizen of the United States!"

He looked at me rather puzzled.

"Puerto Ricans have been U.S. citizens since 1917. Although the Island is not a state it is a U.S. territory. Its situation is unique in that it is a commonwealth, or should I say, a free and associated state, it equally shares all the liberties and rights of the fifty states of the republic and more."

"Do you have American money?"

"We use the same currency!" His eyebrows topped his forehead. I pulled out from my pocket some American Express travelers checks I had purchased from a bank back home. As I handed the correct amount over to the clerk he blurbed out another question.

"I notice these are purchased in Puerto Rico, is this the same American Express in the states?"

I looked away rather upset and answered slowly.

"Yes!" I was just about to ask to speak with the manager when he handed me a key. He gave me the closest room to the office; but, at least I had a place to sleep for the night.

This was the first incident in which I recognized that many people, at least those I've come in contact with, had little knowledge of the island of Puerto Rico and know even less about its culture. During the first month here I was asked naive questions like: how long does it take to drive there; do the people live in huts; what language do they

speak; what does it look like; do they have T.V.; do they carry switch blades; do you like revolutions?

Such questions of ignorance and misunderstanding overwhelmed me with turbulent feelings of alienation from those around me. I couldn't comprehend the inadequacy of social and historical education among college level students in relation to their hispanic neighbors, the Puerto Ricans.

In many periods in art history we have learned how artists reacted to the many problems of civilization and how they faced the challenge brought forth by these problems by creating some sort of statement on how they felt. With this in mind, I was determined to show the existence of the Puerto Rican people and to defend our cultural identity through my prints. This is a difficult task, but I felt the challenge could not be left unattempted.

SECTION I - BORINQUEN

(Bō·rēñ·ken)

The challenge of visually describing Borinquen had left me with many questions. The major one was how to present a valid visual representation of this culture to the artistically elite as well as the general public and make my statement basically clear.

Much of what I knew of Puerto Rico I had taken for granted. I had to detach myself and look at the Island, its people, and its history with new eyes, as if Columbus had just landed on its coast. With pencil, paper, and camera I decided to roam free through the Island capturing as much useful information as I could. Obviously, I was far from the Island so I planned three trips. Of these three trips, two were during my Christmas vacations and one was in the summer. The latter was the most fruitful. During my adventures through the Island I was amazed by all those things that at one time were just common place. I saw a conglomerate human being made from a variety of different levels of culture within this water enframed region.

The word Borinquen derives from the Taino Indians of the Arawak culture, given to the eastern most island of the Greater Antilles between the Atlantic Ocean and the Caribbean Sea. The english translation of Boriquen, the original Taino word, is "the land of valiant men." It is a

tropical island with mountainous interior with an average year round temperature of 78°F. It's an intermingled island of Indian, Hispanic, and African cultures.

I took that Eastern flight on my first trip to San Juan and I remember it well. After the plane settled onto the runway, the wheels screeched and held, and a couple of hundred people burst into applause. Many of them were chatting lustily to one another in Spanish. They were overjoyed: they were home and it was home in such a different way than home is in New York. The Eastern flight was met by one of the noisiest most jubilant throngs I have ever seen at an airport. Whole families came out in the thick stifling heat to meet travelers, and they brought roosters and food. I was surrounded by dozens of pairs of arms thrusting out violently for one another, and then the Puerto Rican people were hugging one another, and calling out their names.¹

Like David Weinberg I experienced something similar the last time I visited Puerto Rico. Why were these travelers so overwhelmed with joyous emotions? What impelled their desperate urge to be in Puerto Rico? I asked myself these very questions in search for the answers. I too felt as they did upon setting foot on Borinquen. With my research materials at hand I toured the Island studying the Puerto Rican culture as if an anthropologist, participating and observing in as much activity as I could within a limited amount of time because I had to return to Rochester and obviously wouldn't be able to do this over there.

¹David Weinberg, "Island of the Damned," Rolling Stone, 25 Nov. 1982, p. 81.

These last two years I have collected an unexhaustable amount of information in support of my Master's statement about Borinquen. This data was of great value to me, beyond the pages of research materials, since I had recently made Puerto Rico my home and I knew virtually nothing of its cultural heritage. The reason for my ignorance, to give a little of my background, is that I am German born. Ever since I left Germany, I have traveled from place to place as nomads do, never living anywhere for more than two years. Much of my childhood was spent throughout the United States with short periods in Puerto Rico and Panama. When I began to root, I was plucked and placed in a new environment. It had been difficult to acquire any definite cultural identity. One attribute which eased the research on the culture of Borinquen was the vernacular understanding of the Spanish language developed during the course of those confusing nomadic years.

I read countless books on the history of Puerto Rico from the pre-colombia Indians to the modernization of the Island and documents of its geography, its music, its crafts, its traditions, and its legends. I attended festivals, each unique in its own way, offering a wide variety of experiences. I even had the opportunity to do my own excavating at different locals on the Island finding rewarding traces of Borinquens past. But, it was the shared interaction with the "jíbaro", the country peasant farmer,

that was the most important influence in my visual representation of Borinquen.

It wasn't an arduous task finding a "jíbaro"; I could see him just about anywhere in my home town, Naranjito, laboring the land on the mountains. It is here in the semi-wilderness of the Islands interior where the "jíbaro" feels most comfortable with himself and God. He didn't have to contend with obnoxious tie wearing businessmen who only brought lies and deceptions of economic recovery.

I sat for hours listening to their stories, their songs, and their sorrows. It was a different kind of history, one rarely found in books. This first hand information widened my heart and even jerked tears from my eyes.

A poem by Francisco Roque Muñoz:

The most unfortunate man
Is the small peasant farm owner
Today worst off than the day laborer
Because he loses his sown land.
Today he finds himself abandoned,
And lives in the worst conditions
Drenched with sweat
Looking at his coffee field
He lives every day more treacherously
The small peasant farmer.

He must pay insurance
To the government without condition
This he does by obligation
Even if he must lay down in the dark.
And he can't, I swear to you,
Pay a worker,
He wears and eats the worst
And walks afoot on the paths
Weeds of the assassins
The small peasant farmer.

He goes out to hire a farmhand
 And after so much eagerness
 That one asks for a smile
 Ten dollars and sustenance.
 His wife sells the hog
 That she bred with so much ardor
 To pay the doctor
 Who looks at her disdainfully
 And that is how he lives in grief
 The small peasant farmer.²

Each time I returned to Rochester, after visiting Puerto Rico, I brought back the "jíbaro" with me. Before beginning on a print, I looked through the countless slides I have taken. Sometimes it takes just a few slides to decide on what type of imagery I would use for a print. Other times I'd be days viewing all of the slides several times or looking through old pictures and newspaper clippings which I have collected. If I weren't spiritually motivated by the slides I looked through my notes and read the stories the "jíbaros" told me. These developed pictures in my memory that were so real I could walk into them and fantasize.

Schools were few, roads were fewer, chickens laid eggs under thatched cottages, goats cavorted outside and were corraled for a milking and sometimes killed for a stuffing, the squeal of pigs and not of factory whistles woke up the countryside. Pale, wiry, mustached, sleepy-eyed men tumbled out of hammocks pulling up their

²Francisco Roque Muñoz, Desde un Rincón de mi Tierra, Trans. Reynaldo I. Santiago, (Santurce, Puerto Rico: Pronto Photocopy & Printing Co., Inc., 1981), p. 44.

trousers for the day, and barefooted women in terribly starched dresses of many colors began preparing strong coffee in iron kettles and serving it steaming in polished cocoanut shells. Although Porto Rico was not then one of the great sugar producing centers of the world, there was usually sugar at the bottom of the cocoanut and the sleepy-eyed man stirred it lazily with a wooden spoon, tasting it with his eyes and his nose. Inside the hut the brats wailed; one of them soothed itself by finding five eggs, certified by cackles, under the floor, another by plucking from the wall the image of the Virgin, printed in screaming blue and red. The men left for the field to cut cane, to lead the oxen on their sugar grinding merry-go-round, to prune or pick the coffee bushes in the sloping shade of the tall guavas, to pick and seed the cotton or sift the tobacco leaves or spade in their masters field truck. As they wound their way along the coastal plain or twisted along the precipitous mountain paths a very few pennies jingled in their pockets.³

After deciding what I want to say, I make several drawings and from these I come up with what will be the master drawing for the editioning of the print. Then I make Xerox copies of the master drawing; these are taped together. For each color I make one complete set of copies. Each set will be used as a stencil. Wherever I cut an area out on the stencil, that is where the color will be deposited on the paper. This is a basic serigraph technique called paper stenciling. The only difference is that with the Xerox stencils one is able to make an edition of up to

³Luis Muñoz Marín, "The Sad Case of Puerto Rico," The American Mercury, Feb. 1929, pp. 136-141.

200 prints or more without worry about the problems usually encountered when using other types of paper stencils.

An example of a print using the paper stenciling method is "La 16" (plate I). It is difficult to determine whether a print has been produced by using paper stencils or commercial film stencils. Both allow for crisp clean edges and thin sharp lines. The advantage of using the paper stencil method is its expediency. The film stencils take much time removing them from the screen and cleaning. As for the paper stencils, all you have to do is peel it off and tape the next stencil on the screen saving many hours of cleaning and adhering.

Another technique common in my serigraphs is the liquid block-out stencil method. This is the most direct method of serigraphy leaving room for spontaneity and the freedom of breaking out from the constraints of printing. Using the liquid block-out on the screen allows me to create a wide variety of textures and lines as if painting on a canvas. To the untrained eye, my prints have been referred to as paintings. "Reconstrucción Cultural III" (plate VIII) is an example of this painterly effect though it contains the unmistakable qualities of a serigraph print.

I used the camera as the frame for my imagery in earlier serigraphs focusing on cultural concepts illustrated by the late Puerto Rican painters Francisco Oller, Ramón Frade, and Miguel Pou, who took their subject matter from

everyday life. I describe my first prints as stylized romantic realism, exploring the structural elements of the poor, not necessarily their own property, and inviting the viewer to share the expressive beauty and vitality of the tropical palette present in our urban and rural environment. I used the camera as a tool in search for prospective prints which led to the wide range of themes in my work. On viewing these prints collectively, they may represent a pictorial documentation of Borinquen as seen through the eye of the camera.

As I read and experienced more about Borinquen I developed various responses to a variety of situations and settings on and off the Island. My stylized pictorial constructions will become an ephemeral stage in the growth of my imagery, never-the-less, they shall remain as a contributing factor in future statements. In my studies, I came in constant contact with contrasting information about the historical culture of Borinquen. What is Puerto Rican culture? This built a decisive force within me stimulating my curiosity for the truth. I retreated into a world enclosed by the inner walls of my mind where an interchanging of ideas and concepts was taking place. As I searched through my thoughts I kept recalling the definition of the word culture.

The term culture includes technology and the material artifacts resulting from the work of man, conduct and habits which govern interpersonal relationships, aesthetic and legal ethnic norms, special systems of symbols like language or mathematics, the sciences and knowledge (factual or empirical), and other products of human activity in the society.⁴

I was tantalized by my reading on the truth of what the Puerto Rican culture was all about. I wanted to convey this feeling in my prints making a more personal statement on human and social values. I virtually abandoned my scientific approach in my studies and image making by deliberately attacking my screen in a revolting manner. It was as if being a child and for the first time feeling the hostilities and deceptions of the real world.

Without a master drawing I stood in front of the screen holding an airbrush containing liquid block-out. The surface of the screen represents a wall and the airbrush a can of spray paint. I sprayed randomly over the wall with lines, blotches, and countless words, some of them are almost nonsense, but they conjure up an atmosphere of delightful boyish naughtiness and irreverence. (Little if any of this sort of grafitti is seen in Puerto Rico). If some Puerto Ricans engage in spray painting walls it is because they have come in contact with the diverse cultures

⁴Eugenio Fernández Méndez, Historia Cultural De Puerto Rico, Trans. Reynaldo I. Santiago (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Ediciones "El Cemí", 1971). p. 4.

of large city ghettos, like those of New York City, where they practice this manner of expression.

Another technique used in my prints is the lithograph process using plates, graphite pencils and/or sticks, and liquid tusche sprayed with an airbrush. When I combined both serigraph and lithograph in a print, I referred back to the pictorial settings "de novo" of earlier prints. The black and white lithograph was made subservient to the serigraphed background in order to enhance the image. I tried not to use too much light on the subject matter preferring to give the print an overall flatness rather than dramatize the image with strong light sources which may separate the two processes, lithograph and serigraph, and pull the print apart. Due to the fact that I have been able to create a harmonized print using both lithograph and serigraph processes I feel I can invent a word that describes this amalgamation. I will refer to these prints as "serithographs."

SECTION II - PLATES

"La 16"

(The 16)

Plate I

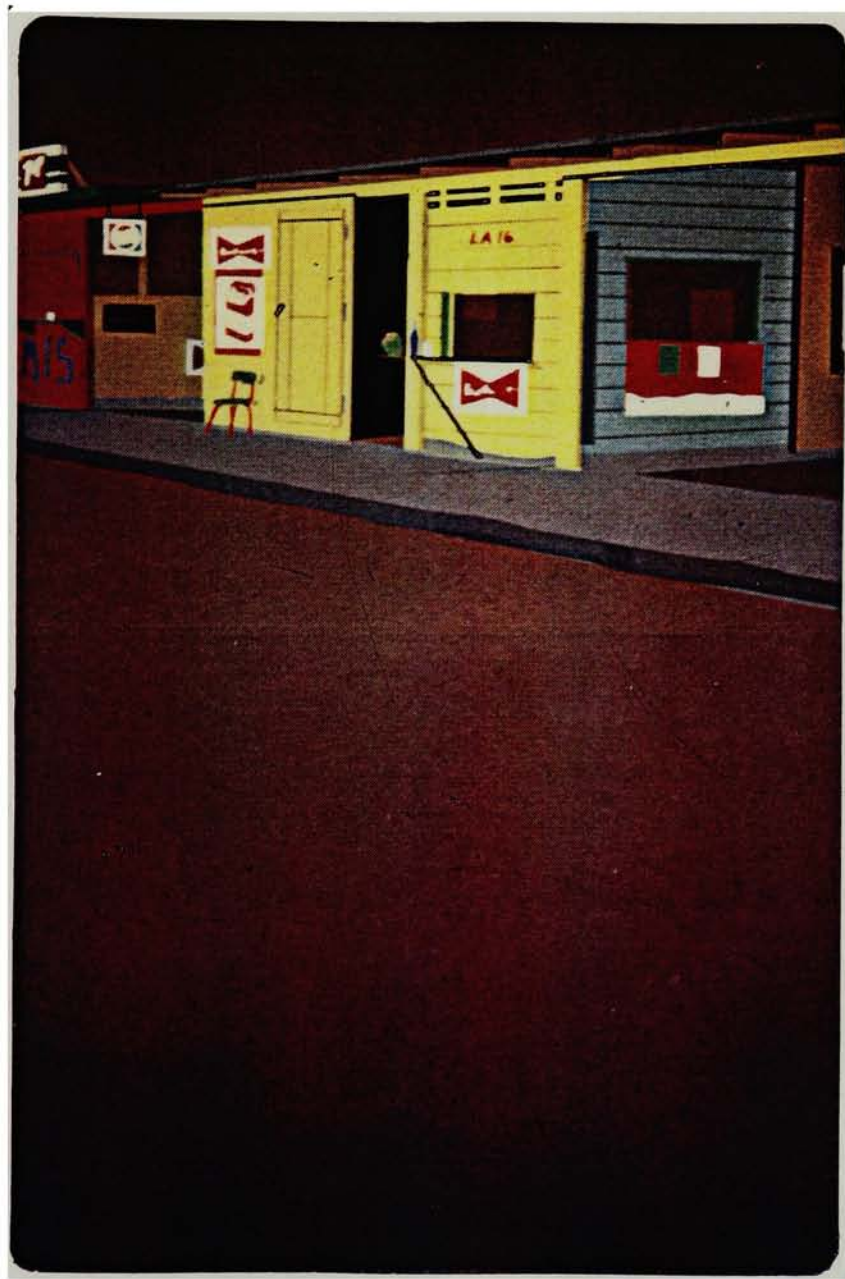
After spending many hours chasing tropical fish in the water, my skin turned a rich reddish brown from the over exposure to the hot morning sun. As a boy I remembered vaguely this place by the beach where I filled my stomach with "alcapurrias", fried green plaintain paste stuffed with beef. My thirst was quenched after drinking the ice cold coconut milk fresh from the shell. Pleasing myself, I darted back to the beach without hesitation feeling the swish-swash of the liquid in my stomach.

I went back to Luquillo recently and saw a long line of brightly colored shacks. There must be fifty or more of these shacks bunched together haphazardly almost overlapping each other. As I walked towards the vibrantly colored structures I felt again like that boy who was attracted by the tropical colored fish in the water. The same smell of creole food gently touched my nose making me hungry for those delicious "alcapurrias". There were signs all over the place promoting the vices of man, something I had not noticed as an innocent child, and almost wished they weren't

there. Still, the signs added to the overall delightful coloration of the shacks causing a warm and pleasant visual experience.

"La 16" is made exclusively with Xerox paper stencils using a multifilament screen and a hard edge squeegee on Rives BFK paper.⁵ Some transparent greys were used to show shadows creating the illusion of the mid morning sun shining on the intense colors of the shacks. The brown background depicts the color of my skin when I was a boy playing on the beach, an image tatooed to my memory for life.

⁵See Appendix II - Technical Data, p. 49.



"La 16"

"...Con Salsa y Pimienta"

(With Sauce and Pepper)

Plate II

Roasted pigs are seen everywhere on the island of Borinquen. The "lechón asado" (roast pork) is an aspect of traditional folklore dating back to the days of the spanish conquistadores and has remained a staple food to this day. It is a symbol of feasting and just having a good time.

In my conversations with many people from other cultures I saw that they were repulsed by the idea of a pig roast and thought it to be a grotesque display of barbaric attitudes. To me, it is nothing of the sort; I love to eat "lechón asado" with "salsa y pimienta" (sauce and pepper). I made this print to make people react to it as if they would be seeing the pig in a show window of a road side restaurant for the first time. The responses were varied and to my surprise not all were negative. I was wrong to think that most people in a high technological environment were insensitive to the products of hispanic folklore.

"... Con Salsa y Pimienta" was made using a combination of paper stencils and liquid block-out techniques in a played down color palette. The purple background color was blended with a soft red to depict the glow of the hot coals in the early morning when the "lechón" is usually begun to roast. The wire holding the "lechón" to the pole was made

using metallic silver ink. When an indirect light shines on the wire it glows as it would when the cook lifts a lantern to the "lechón" to check his progress.



"...Con Salsa y Pimienta"

"Transformación"

(Transformation)

Plate III

To keep up with Puerto Rican news during my stay in Rochester, I had one of the Island's newspapers sent to me on a daily basis. This kept me in close contact with cultural and political events taking place during the course of the year. In one of the papers I came across a photograph of a genuine "jíbaro" which, in fact, clearly illustrates his every day working attire. The caption beneath it read, "Our 'jíbaro', symbol of work, tireless, ready to undertake his working day, to work for his bread, is the inspiration for a new week of labor which begins."⁶

This print is based on the transformation of time and progress from the days of the Taino Indians to the modern industrialization of Borinquen. The sun, a religious representation of the Taino culture which I repeatedly use in the prints that follow, symbolizes the beginning of the Islands cultural history. The "jíbaro" is the symbolic backbone of the Puerto Rican society and the computer hardware is the future which lies ahead. "Transformación" is an objective view, liberated from all past and present prejudices, in a narration of cultural change. This print

⁶"El Reportero", trans. Reynaldo I. Santiago, 23 Nov. 1982, p. 34.

consists of a combination of several technical applications such as serigraph paper stenciling, liquid block-out stenciling, and stone lithography using grease pencils.



"Transformación"

"La Garita"

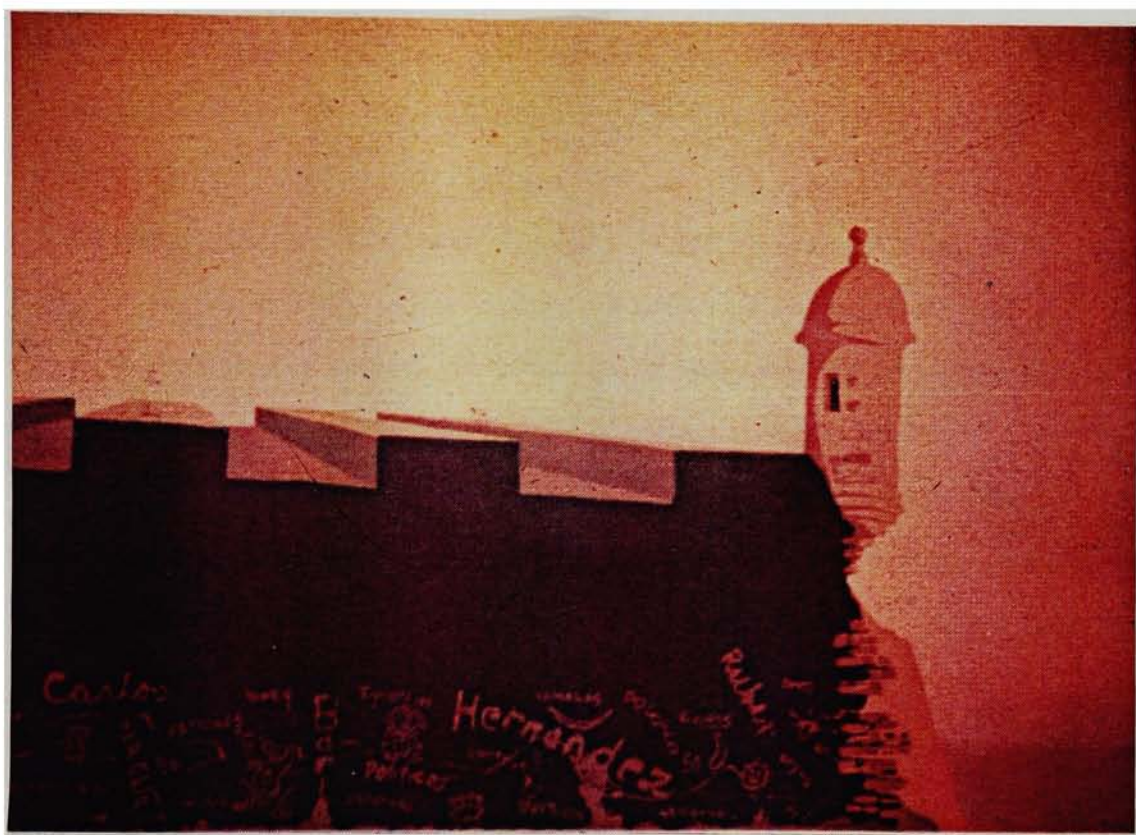
(The Watch Post)

Plate IV

These watchman's booths are found throughout the thirty foot high city walls of Old San Juan, the capital of Puerto Rico. These four by seven foot cylinders have become the symbol of supremacy in the New World and the protectorate of our Cultural Heritage. Many guards have lost their lives in these posts to invaders, but there were always replacements who carried on their valuable purpose. There are even legends telling of a guard who was in love with a beautiful Indian woman. He left his post in the night and ran off with her to the mountains. A band of Indians, including the one she was promised to by her family according to Indian traditions, searched for them and killed them both while embraced in love. A beautiful tree and a pair of twin mountains are situated where they supposedly had died symbolizing the truth in people's hearts.

Nowadays the "garitas" are a convenient place for people to urinate losing the respect a national monument deserves. Something has definitely been lost in the course of time. This question has left the doors open for future investigations which may lead to new directions in my art work.

"La Garita" is the first print I have done by the exclusive use of liquid block-out on the screen as a stencil. If the background glitters in the sun it's because I mixed silver and gold metallic inks with the red-orange pigment to simulate the effects of dusk over the walls of Old San Juan. The writing and other marks on the wall are not on the original structure; I have put them there for the sake of pleading. I want the leaders of our nation to look upon our culture and reflect on its endangered status of deterioration.



"La Garita"

"Reconstrucción Cultural"

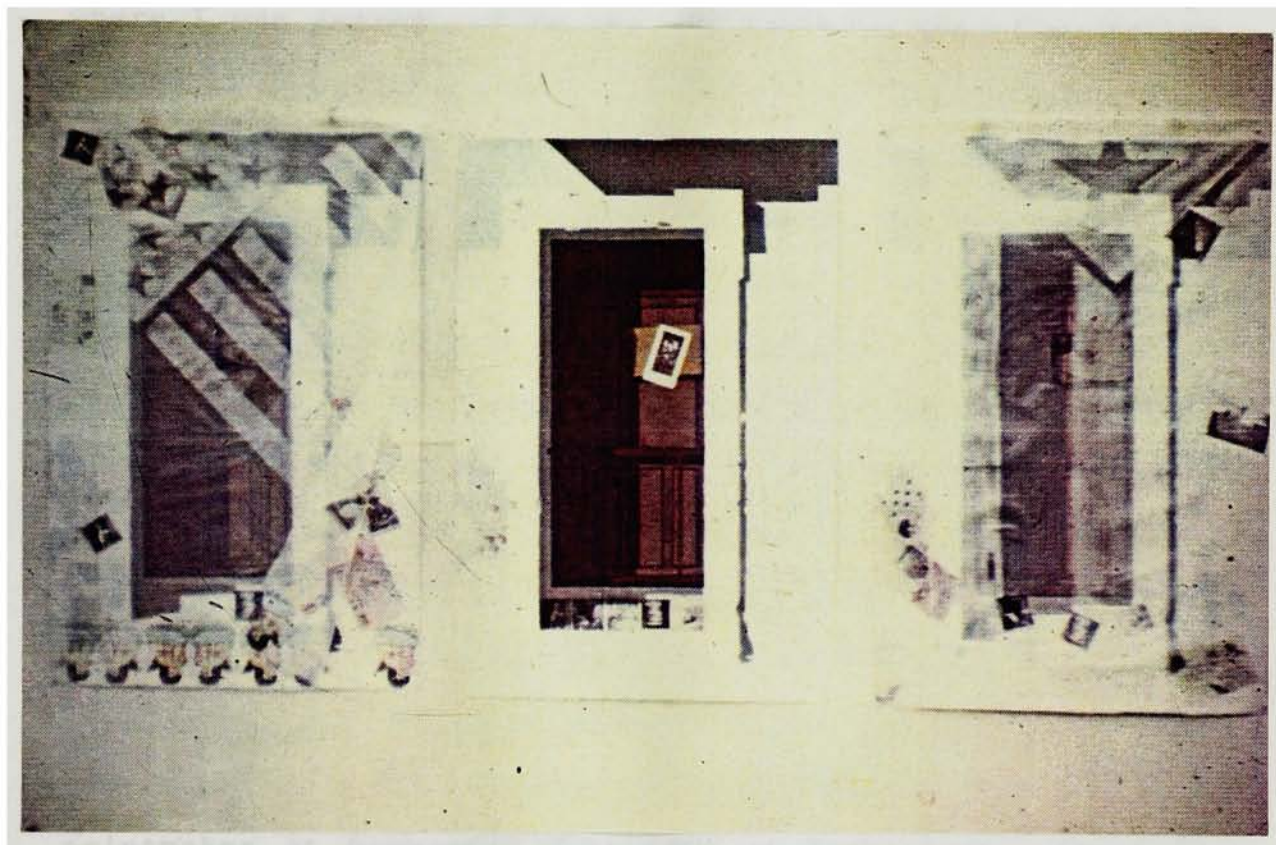
(Cultural Reconstruction)

Plate V

The triptych "Reconstrucción Cultural" is one of the most rewarding experiences I have had during my graduate studies. This is a collaboration piece created by two printmakers with noticably different styles and cultural background. Chuck Cosantino and I thought that the idea of combining our styles and way of thinking would be beneficial to our understanding of each others art and concepts.

There were many determinant factors which contributed to the development of the triptych such as time, money, decisions regarding the images, problems encountered in the production process, and a transaction of ideas and concepts. The entire project has been documented with photographs, preliminary drawings, and notes.

The finished piece is definitely an example of cross cultural influences based on a collaborate input by two artists. On viewing the triptych, traces of both American and Hispanic Cultures can be found. There are also images common to both cultures making it difficult to distinguish their origin. This was elaborated on in the overall statement of the piece. "Reconstrucción Cultural" is part of the 6th San Juan Biennial of Latin American Graphics exhibited at the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture in Puerto Rico.



"Reconstrucción Cultural"

"Chicago"

Plate VI

I worked in Chicago several years ago as head of the quality control department at Abex Corporation. It was here where I was introduced to the air brush by one of my fellow workers. I bought a small compressor and an air brush kit. I experimented on canvas and masonite board getting acquainted with the effects possible and the limitations of the air brush. It was so amazing what I could create with it that I began working on a part time basis painting murals on vans. It became more than a hobby; it was an obsession. Painting murals was also very profitable at that time. My interest in creating art was expanded by the use of the air brush and it helped me decide taking formal courses in art to develop and strengthen my talents as a painter.

Using the air brush method on the screen was an idea created after a joke told to me by Chuck Cosantino, a fellow printmaker at Rochester Institute of Technology. The joke went like this:

Why don't Puerto Ricans have credit cards?

They can't spray paint their names small enough on the back of the cards!

I am sure he meant no harm with his ethnic humor but it did stir my curiosity. I recalled those nights in Chicago when I air brushed the murals on the vans using several size

nozzles to create different forms of line and shape. "That's it," I said, "I will use the air brush on the screen and show that the Puerto Rican can spray paint his name small enough on the back of the credit cards.

The print "Chicago" was produced using serigraph and lithograph processes with air brush applications to both the aluminum plate and the screen. Some graphite pencil lines have been done on the plate.⁷ The words and figures in the print represent popular proverbs, names, and symbols common on the Island.⁸ Most of the words were made using the air brush.

It is sad to see how hundreds of Puerto Ricans have ended up living in slums and ghettos in America. I dedicate this print to those Puerto Ricans who came to the United States since the Great Depression in search for opportunity and a better way of life. They brought with them songs, dance, music, creole food, and other aspects of Puerto Rican culture. Many have gone back to Puerto Rico empty handed.

After I finished the print I showed it to Chuck and we laughed for a good while. He was surprised to see how his joke had influenced the images in my print.

⁷See Appendix II - Technical Data, p. 51.

⁸See Appendix I - Word List, p. 46.



"Chicago"

"Bumker Hill"

Plate VII

Puerto Rico is a society based on masculine dominance, a trait found in all Hispanic cultures. The man, head of the family, is usually the one who has the last word in any decision to be made and it is respected unconditionally. Most of the local bars in Puerto Rico are traditionally the place for the man. This is where men go to lounge and converse with each other after a day's work before going home.

This bar in particular is mostly busy on "viernes social" (social friday), the last working day of the week which the Puerto Rican man has anxiously awaited for. He feverishly indulges in alcoholic beverages and cigarettes to the point of dizziness. He will sit at the bar and/or play some pool under an overhead fan and tell of his experiences during the week. While the jukebox plays old "jíbaro" songs in the background, he talks about politics, cock fights, women, cars, and his crop if he is a farmer. "Bumker Hill" is located right outside the limits of my hometown, Naranjito, and if by any chance you drive by there you could see and hear these things I have talked about.

Puerto Rico has not always been a male dominant society. Before the conquistadores arrival on the shores of Borinquen the Taino Indian woman was a prolific individual

and played an important role in the socio-cultural development of the Arawak tribes throughout the Caribbean Islands. "It was the oldest daughter of the ruling king or queen who would rule the tribe if both of her parents were to die. The sons of the ruling king or queen were considered illegitimate according to Taino tradition."⁹

The print "Bumker Hill" is my interpretation of the reformation of traditional norms which have and will continue to take place in Puerto Rico. The Puerto Rican woman today, for one reason or another, is standing up for her rights as an individual on her own accord. By the way things are going she may soon obtain the equality she has been looking for among Puerto Rican men.

The Indian symbols found on the lithographed portion of the print represents the past Taino Indian matrilineal society and the serigraphed portion represents the male domineering society today in Puerto Rico. The unification of these two printing processes cleverly illustrates my statement on the possibilities of a stronger Puerto Rican society if the customs of the past were closely studied and modified to conform with the rapid progress of Borinquen.

⁹Jalil Sued-Badillo, La Mujer Indígena y su Sociedad, Trans. Reynaldo I. Santiago (Río Piedras, Puerto Rico: Ediciones Antillana, 1979), p. 27.



"Bunker Hill"

"Reconstrucción Cultural III"

(Cultural Reconstruction III)

Plate VIII

"Many of Puerto Rico's remaining folk and religious traditions were further jeopardized during the early 1940's when Operation Bootstrap--a far-reaching program for the industrialization of the island--was initiated by Luis Muñoz Marín. Puerto Rico was transformed, almost overnight, from an agrarian society to a predominantly urban one, and Puerto Ricans suffered a concomitant loss of traditional spiritual values and cultural identity. Realizing this, Marín initiated a program called Operation Serenity, whose avowed goal was to channel the island's newly acquired economic wealth into programs aimed at revitalizing Puerto Rican cultures."¹⁰

Since the commencement of Operation Serenity there has been a crescendoing state of cultural awareness among the Puerto Rican people and especially among artists. This is the cultural renaissance of Puerto Rico, a movement very much alive today throughout Borinquen. Because of this movement few people who visit the island and fewer who live there question if Puerto Rican culture really exists.

¹⁰Lee Kravitz, "Ricardo Alegría and the Renaissance of Puerto Rican Culture," Museum, July/August 1982, pp. 48-9.

"Reconstrucción Cultural III" is a visual collection of figures and words which have, in some way or another, become significant symbols in what Puerto Rican culture is all about. This is only a small representation of the innumerable characters related to this culture, but, are among the most important. To evoke some of Puerto Rican mental characteristics and images I have included a motley of words and figures like these: names of famous people, popular proverbs, products of folk art, spanish forts, fruits and vegetables, local sports, and a variety of Taino petroglyph figures.

If this print were to be viewed vertically, a skeletal outline of the third panel of the triptych by the same name "Reconstrucción Cultural" emerges. Influences caused by the working collaboration with Chuck Cosantino during the production of the triptych can also be seen here. The use of Xerox transfers is a visual surprise which has added a new twist to the printed material and I used it enthusiastically to enhance the overall statement of the image. The picture is of two modern day "jíbaros", my cousins.

"Falto de Restauración"

(Lack of Restoration)

Plate IX

Though this print contains similar characters found in "Reconstrucción Cultural III" it is different in the sense of structural weight. Unlike the floating illusions of "Reconstrucción Cultural III" this print emulates the pictorial constructions found in my earlier prints. I have included a window, a one way sign, bricks, and grass to emphasize a wall at the end of a street. Some of the objects and lines may still appear floating in the air but do not effect the impression of a wall.

The bright colors in "Falta de Restauración" reflect the colors found in town festivals throughout Borinquen. The most colorful festival I have been to is that of "Loíza Aldea", a village on the northern coast of Puerto Rico. I have yet to see anything that matches this colorful experience. Brilliant greens, yellows, blues, and reds decorate the entire town and its people. Ribbons, flowers, banners, flags, clothing, lights, masks, buildings, and even the fireworks generated fantastic spectacle of cheerful delight.

At one time these festivals were solely based on legends which contained and great religious significance to our people. "Due to the impact of socio-economical changes

which has affected Puerto Rico in recent years there have been grave transformations in traditional practices."¹¹ This can readily be seen at the annual "Loíza Aldea" Feast of the Saint Santiago where halloween masks are beginning to take the place of the traditional hand made cocoanut masks of the village. To the younger generations this is just another carnival. Does this mean that Borinquens cultural heritage is being swallowed by a new way of life? There must be a least "one way" to save the significance of our historical traditions. The question is still unanswered.

¹¹Ricardo Alegría, "La Fiesta de Loíza," El Nuevo Día, Trans. Reynaldo I. Santiago, 25 July 1982, p. 6.



"Falta de Restauración"

"El Poder del Jíbaro"
(The Power of the Farmer)

Plate X

The "jíbaro" has the power to determine the future of Puerto Rico. It is up to him to decide what aspects of our culture must be saved from deterioration. He knows what is best for Borinquen and its people. Politicians go to him for advice for he is in tuned with the earth and his fellow man. If he thinks that he is not ready for change than change will not take place. In the last twenty years he has been asked to decide if Puerto Rico should become the fifty-first state or an independent nation. This is the most difficult of decisions he has ever faced.

Once I was told how a "jíbaro" chose two of his best oxen and sold the others. He named one "estado" (state) and the other "libre" (free). All of his plowing was done using these two oxen. The "jíbaro" said that when one of the oxen dies it will be time to make the decision on Puerto Ricos future. The oxen left alive will tell us if Borinquen should become a state or a free nation.

This story is what inspired me to do the print "El Poder del Jíbaro". I really don't know how much truth there is in the story, but, it depicts the general attitude of confusion among the people of Puerto Rico. It is as absurd as flipping a coin to decide something so detrimental to the

existence of the Puerto Rican culture. The point "El Poder del Jíbaro" is directed not only to the Puerto Ricans but to all people as well so that they too can share what the "jíbaro" is feeling. The following words by the late painter Miguel Pou helps explain what this print means to me.

Art is a state of the peoples' collective soul in constant evolution and the artists could be a revolutionary who, in advance of his times, carries a necessary message of renovation.¹²

I have combined several techniques and processes in the making of this print. I used paper stencils and the air brush to make the sidewalk on the aluminum lithograph plate. Some of the lines on the plate are drawn using a number eight graphite pencil. I also used the air brush to spray the liquid blockout on the screen between each color pulled. I used a Speed Ball pen and liquid blockout to write some of the words seen in the screened areas.

¹²Peter Bloch, Painting and Sculpture of the Puerto Ricans (New York: PLUS ULTRA Educational Publishers, Inc., 1978), p. 104.



"El Poder del Jíbaro"

CONCLUSION

During the last two years I have developed a strong cultural consciousness which has helped me understand the customs, ideas, skills, arts, and history of the Puerto Rican people. This enlightenment has been reflected on to my prints. I take my art very seriously. I put my heart into it and at times it causes trouble the way love always causes trouble. My statements are culturally strong but it is the reason for which I made these prints. If people would spend some of their time to understand the cultures of their neighbors maybe they won't keep thinking foolish things about each other.

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APPENDIX I - Word List

matojo	- bunch of weeds
cultura	- culture
bongó	- bongo rhythms
chula	- beautiful (feminine)
la ley	- the law
solo un juego	- only a game
colo	- black african (slang)
jodón	- has stuff in plastic bag
guayaba	- guava fruit
nina	- girl
maví	- a root drink
calle luna	- moon street
Boquerón	- large mouth (town)
bugalú	- a native dance
escuela	- school
yuca	- yucca plant
Ama	- Amarilis
Naranjito	- small orange (town)
Vocero	- the voice (bloody newspaper)
salsa	- native songs and dance
tránsito	- one way
pueblo mío	- my town
albayalde	- small red ant
pana	- native fruit
batey	- Taino Indian word for home
santero	- saint carver
papaya	- native fruit
el barrio	- the neighborhood
Pitirre	- small bird
buey	- ox
corona	- crown
achiote	- rice coloring seeds
Lerenes	- native vegetable
machete	- knife for cutting sugar cane
agricultura	- agriculture
mamey	- native fruit (or easy)
le·lo·lai	- native jíbaro songs
paso fino	- horse riding sport
candela	- trouble (flame)
jíbaro	- small country farmer
macho	- he man
5 hijos	- five sons
alacrán	- poisonous centipede
paloma	- pigeon
plátano	- plantain vegetable
el negocio	- the buisness
I.A.U.	- Inter American University

mango	- mango
Munos Marín	- first Puerto Rican governor
Hostos	- Puerto Rican revolutionary
Borincano	- Puerto Rican
jobo	- native fruit
loco	- crazy
De Diego	- Puerto Rican poet and writer
Lola - Miguel	- inlaws
Tapia	- novelist, historian, poet of Puerto Rico
espuela	- rooster spur sharpened for cock fights
grito de Lares	- crisis at the town Lares
maraca	- Taíno instrument (gourd filled with pebbles and stick handle)
luto	- mourning; sorrow, grief
hay sas	- proverb relating to girlish acts
Caparra	- first settlement in Puerto Rico
Campeche	- famous Puerto Rican painter
te odio	- I hate you lovingly
landy	- Orlando
Remiel	- rare name of a cousin
ley del mackete	- law of the sugar cane knife
Juan y Lida	- two unique jibaros
Cordero	- famous teacher
Ashford	- Colonel in the U.S. Army Medical Team
plátano	- the plantain
pomarrosa	- beautiful flowering fruit by the rivers in Puerto Rico
ridículo	- ridiculous
caballo	- horse, clumsy horse (slang)
gallina	- chicken
bocú	- large mouth
papito	- small potato
el indio	
estuvo aquí	- the Indian was here
libre	- free
la familia	- the family
que miras	- what are you looking at?
halo, quines	- hello, who is it?
cabrón	- large goat
tres pepas	- three seeds
chango	- black bird mascot of Naranjito
madre	- mother
mío	- mine
rey	- king
bolita	- small balls
vaya	- wow
quiero irme	- I want to leave
cuchillo	- knife
trompetista	- trumpet player
la negra	- the girl

saca la mano	
del bolsillo	- take your hand out of your pocket
chillo	- male lover
sal	- get out
güiros	- Taíno instrument
Rubén	- Independence party leader
Hernández	- Popular party leader
Carlos	- New Progressive party leader
Taíno	- Caribbean Indians
Ignéri	- Caribbean Indians before the Taínos
ceramicas	- ceramics
artesanos	- crafts persons

APPENDIX II - Technical Data

Serigraph Paper and Liquid Stenciling Method

Supplies: screen material (polyfilament), hard square edge squeegee, mixing cups, registration pins (2), cotton rags, paper travels or newspaper (for cleaning), exacto knife

1. Make Xerox copies of your master drawing. One complete set should be made for each color desired. If drawing is larger than a single Xerox sheet, use small pieces of scotch tape to correct all sections together. Use a light table to facilitate proper alignment.
2. With a hole puncher make two holes on the shorter side of the stencils. Each hole must be aligned at exactly $\frac{1}{3}$ the width of the paper from both edges.
3. Use an exacto knife to cut out the areas where you want a specific color to be deposited on your print. On each stencil you will cut out areas for one color only.
4. Attach the registration pins to a punched stencil and center the stencil (on the table or board) under the screen. Tape the pins to the table on the closest side to you leaving the stencil on the pins. (Do not tape the stencil to the pins.)
5. Make sure the screen is lifted $\frac{1}{2}$ inch from the table surface. Use cardboard tabs at the corners of the screen to lift the screen.
6. Pour the ink* on the farther side of the screen and scrape the ink lightly over the image area (flood stroke) with the squeegee. With considerable pressure push the squeegee back to the other side of the screen. Lift the screen; you will see that the stencil has attached itself to the underside of the screen. You are now ready to print.
7. To change a stencil simply peel the old one off, clean the screen thoroughly, place the new stencil on the pins, and repeat step 6.

For the liquid stenciling method you only need brushes, water soluble liquid blockout solution, and if you have recognizable images a master drawing is recommended. Paint directly on the screen with the blockout solution and after

10 minutes you can print. You will still need to punch holes on your paper if fine registration is desired when using the pins.

*The ink must have the consistency of Log Cabin syrup for best results. Thin ink with slow evaporating mineral spirits like Syntol or Naz Dar ink thinners.

Aluminum Plate Graphite Lithography

Supplies: graphite sticks, graphite pencils (#2-8 soft), aluminum plate, plate etch (1 part etch to 2 parts gum), deep plate etch (Red Lacquer), lacquer thinner, lithotine, asphaltum, gum arabic, cheeseclothes, soft cotton rags, buckets, photo sponge, measuring cup, water, soft 2 inch brush

1. Wet the bed of the press lightly with water and place the plate on top of it. With a damp photo sponge press the plate onto the bed wiping from the center to the edges of the plate.
2. Draw on the plate with graphite sticks and pencils using considerable pressure so that the grease enters the grain of the plate. If powder is being used rub it firmly onto the surface of the plate where darker areas are desired.
3. Pour arabic gum over the entire plate and use a soft brush to move the gum around. Softly wipe off excess gum with the sponge being careful not to smear image.
4. Brush the premixed etch on the darker areas first then work into the lighter areas of the image. (This must not last for more than 2 minutes.)
5. Wipe off the gum with damp sponge. Gum the plate again lightly and buff the gum into the plate with cheesecloths until dry. Wait ten minutes.
6. Wash out the image using lithotine and a soft cotton rag. Pour lacquer thinner onto the plate and wipe until image turns silver in color. If some of the graphite pencil marks remain on the plate leave them; they will come off during the rollup. Wait ten minutes.
7. Pour 1/2 teaspoon of Red Lacquer onto image and rub it into the plate, in a circular pattern, with a soft cotton rag. Use a clean rag to rub the lacquer dry. Wait ten minutes.
8. Pour asphaltum onto the plate in the image area and rub into the plate till dry. Wait ten minutes.

The plate is now ready to roll up. It will take several minutes for the plate to pick up the ink.